

Using Film Posters in the Classroom

By Carmen Perez Basanta

"Without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed."
(Wilkins 1972:III)

Until very recently the teaching of vocabulary has lagged behind other advances in ELT; even communicative approaches still ignore the preoccupation that students show when trying to express their feelings, ideas, or needs. The following activity is an attempt to combat this "lack" of lexical content. The objective is to help students to understand new vocabulary and to raise their awareness of both the position of words in the structure of the sentence and their grammatical patterns and combinations.

The activity is based upon the assumption that vocabulary learning should be integrated with grammar. The issue of the relationship between grammar and vocabulary has been discussed in depth, and there is a growing interest in a lexicogrammatical approach as an important part of the language learning syllabus (Willis 1990, Hoey 1991, Owen 1993, Lewis 1993), yet very little has actually been put into practice. Such an approach will produce an important improvement in vocabulary learning.

The pedagogical process towards this end should take into account the following points:

1. ***Finding a suitable context and text.*** Learners need to be presented with an adequate text type which depicts the specific features of the language which we want to analyse. This "genre-based" approach should make students aware of the linguistic and contextual aspects of the text.
Presenting and learning words in context is a vital factor for mastery. It should be noted that in recent years discourse analysis has been concerned both with the features that connect language with context and with how bits of text fit together coherently and form patterns (McCarthy 1990). These patterns are organised through lexical cohesion, words which form chains within a particular topic in a certain context.
2. ***Making vocabulary learning enjoyable and stimulating.*** Learning vocabulary will increase with activities that appeal to learners' personal interests. For this reason, an activity related to films has been chosen, as we assume that most teenagers are "movie-goers" and like to read about films before going to the cinema. Producing film reviews in a posterlike format to arouse students' interest in the type of film, plot, and characters could be a good way to introduce discourse.
3. ***Using activities to involve learners and to develop a real sensitivity towards the language.*** To raise learners' awareness of the lexical items of a language, their meanings, and their lexical relations, content schemata (i.e., background knowledge) has to be activated since this serves to relate and match old and new knowledge. Associating words in semantic fields can also help to facilitate recall. Furthermore, by using texts as our basic format, these activities may provide wide exposure to appropriate models of the written language.

4. ***Helping students to understand words and use them in real situations.*** Learners should be able to use the lexical items actively to improve communication. Vocabulary cannot be taught in isolation. The skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening should be integrated if we are to aim at real vocabulary acquisition.
5. ***Sensitizing learners to grammatical structures.*** Grammar is part of a larger interrelated whole which includes discourse, semantics, and "grammatization" (the process of achieving linguistic expressions through recourse to grammatical rules). Thus, our approach to grammar is meaning-focused, contextualized, and text-based. Grammar is best learnt through activities that encourage students to discover a particular grammar point. Learners thus become analysts and inductively discover rules or make their own generalisations (R. Ellis 1993).

Content and Aims

The poster-based activity should deal with the acquisition of specific vocabulary to be used in certain situations, taking into consideration the semantic field and the position of words in the structure of the sentence. Poster-like film reviews are particularly suitable to develop discourse activities since this type of discourse is rich in grammatical structures such as noun phrases. It is hoped that this will help learners to recognise them and to clarify their meaning.

This activity has been designed for intermediate students who have covered most of the basic grammatical structures. Although they are acquainted with noun phrases in a very general way, they are not fully aware of the different combinations in complex and specific texts. From a grammatical point of view, the goal of the activity is to sensitize learners to the problematic area of compound nouns. There is some conclusive evidence that L2 learners often have particular problems with word constructions, even at fairly advanced levels, since this grammatical structure is quite different from that of their mother tongue. Consequently, L2 learners either need further exposure to English or additional grammatical instruction.

Here we propose an activity which progresses from discourse to semantics and to grammar awareness. The film activity follows this article.

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"THELMA & LOUISE"

a perceptive, amusing, provocative film.

A hugely enjoyable film that manages to make its leading ladies more than appendages of their leading men. Here Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon give stunning performances as two wise-cracking, fast-living ladies escaping from a life of sheer drudgery onto the open roads of beautifully photographed America.

Director: Ridley Scott
An Unmissable February Treat

Hamlet

Mel Gibson in the English language's most exacting role, gives an excellent performance as the tortured Dane.

Glenn Close as the Queen.

Franco Zeffirelli, probably the greatest director of the bard's works on the screen.

With solid support from a host of British greats: Paul Scofield, Alan Bates, Ian Holm, et al.

A good adaptation of Shakespeare with an intelligently pruned-down screenplay

The Silence of the Lambs

(A Blockbuster)

A multi-Oscar winning thriller featuring a truly spine-tingling performance by **Anthony Hopkins** as Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter.

Jodie Foster stars as FBI apprentice Clarice Starling, who, in attempting to track down a brutal serial killer, turns to imprisoned psychiatrist **Lecter** for a unique insight into the workings of the psychotic mind.

Director: **Jonathan Demme**

GREEN CARD

Romantic comedy with the hulking Gerard Depardieu as a bohemian Frenchman who enters into a business marriage with a green-thumbed New York career girl, Andie McDowell, so that he can obtain the green card, and she can hang onto her apartment. They go their separate ways, but an investigation by the government forces them together.

Dead Poet's Society Director: **Peter Weir**

Gawain and the Green Knight

When King Arthur kept his Christmas Court with the Round Table at Camelot:

Jufted ful jolile gentnle fniztef, fsthenn fayred to the court carolef to mate.

Gawain is challenged by the Green Knight

An interesting interpretation of the mysterious Arthurian legend about the gallant knight and his supernatural opponent. The jewel of medieval romance is the story of Gawain's victory in a trial of his chastity and trustworthiness.

Jayne Eyre

(C. Bronte's gothic novel)

"It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world."

A young orphan girl takes the position of a governess to the daughter of a mysterious Mr. Rochester, master of a large and eerie mansion on the Yorkshire moors. Will she receive the same harsh treatment she had as a child, or will she find the love she has longed for? And what dark secret is hidden at the top of the house?

A wonderfully stylish and atmospheric production

Cast: Orson Welles and Jane Fontaine

Agatha Christie's
Suspense Thriller

"The Mirror Crack'd"

"She looked down to Camelot. Out flew the web and floated wide. The mirror crack'd from side to side: The curse is upon me, cried the lady of Shalott"
A. Tennyson

The typical Agatha Christie whodunnit game begins when an American actress is murdered on a movie set in the English countryside. The deceptively ladylike detective, Miss Marples, solves the mystery.

All-Star Cast:
Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson,

Geraldine Chaplin, Kim Novak,
Angela Lansbury, Tony Curtis,
Edward Fox

Directed by Guy Hamilton

Pride and Prejudice

*"It is a truth universally acknowledged,
that a single man in possession of a good
fortune must be in want
of a wife"*

BBC production of Jane Austen's
classic novel. Highly acclaimed for
the strength of characterization and
beauty of location.

Eternally fascinating Elizabeth Bennet
and proud aristocrat Mr. Darcy in a
drama which evolves into a strong
clash of personalities.

A wonderfully-acted comedy
Directed by C. Cook

Preparation

Compilation of a set of eight poster-like film reviews. The texts have been adapted from authentic film reviews.

Discourse comprehension

1. Pre-text. (Strategy: Activating schemata, guiding students to understand discourse)

Think of different films which could be classified as:

love story	tear-jerker
whodunnit	thriller
yarn	remake
chiller	historical
drama	swashbuckler
blockbuster	side-splitter
animated version	screwball comedy
romantic comedy	western

melodrama epic
musical spoof
blood and gore

(Use your dictionary if necessary.)

2. What do the titles of the posters tell you about the films?

(Strategy: predicting from titles).

3. Group the posters according to:

love fear sorrow

Write down as many words and expressions as you can find to justify your opinions.

(Strategy: Identifying important information in discourse)

4. Put these words or phrases in the right column in the box:

eerie house adaptation
whodunnit classic novel
manuscript psychotic mind
mainstream movie murder
business marriage gothic novel
supernatural opponent gallant knight
serial killer Yorkshire moors

Hamlet	Jane Eyre	Thelma & Louise	The Mirror Crack'd
Gawain & The Green Knight	The Silence of the Lambs	Pride & Prejudice	Green Card

(Strategy: Scanning to locate specific information in the texts)

5. Match these words or phrases with their definitions:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. sheer drudgery | a. good with plants |
| 2. bard | b. high-flying professional |
| 3. pruned-down screenplay | c. shortened |
| 4. career girl | d. terrifying |
| 5. spine-tingling | e. boredom |
| 6. green-thumbed | f. poet |

(Strategy: Dealing with unfamiliar words and phrases)

6. To which films do these characters belong? Make predictions about their roles in the films:

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| a psychiatrist | a detective |
| Mr. Darcy | an apprentice |
| the Dane | a knight |
| an American actress | two housewives |

(Strategy: Understanding explicit information, making predictions)

7. Find the relationship between these words and phrases:

- Peter Weir >> Dead Poets' Society
- The Bard >> Shakespeare
- Gawain >> The Green Knight
- Anthony Hopkins >> Hannibal Lecter
- Miss Marple >> Agatha Christie
- Andie McDowell >> Gerard Depardieu

8. Do you think these sentences fit anywhere in the posters? If possible, try to place them in the most appropriate place in the texts.

Marrying marriageable daughters has been the pastime of mothers since the beginning of time.

The grief of the Prince is for the death of a father: He feels aversion towards an incestuous uncle and indignation at the ingratitude and guilt of a mother.

After a wretched childhood spent in an orphanage, she goes as a governess to a distant and romantic mansion.

(Strategy: Understanding discourse parts: coherence and cohesion)

9. There are four texts inserted into the posters which were taken from literary works.

1) In which posters can you find them and what is their communicative value?

2) Do you think there are any expressions no longer in current use?

(Strategy: Going outside discourse in order to interpret it)

10. Can you guess:

1. What dark secret lies at the top of Mr Rochester's house?
2. Why does Clarise Starling go to Hannibal for help?
3. Why do the two ladies start their strange journey?
4. Who killed the American actress?
5. Who stands for "Pride" and who for "Prejudice"?

(Strategy: guessing and inferring information)

11. In all these texts there is a contrast between characters or ideas. Can you find them?

e.g., Bohemian Frenchman >> careerist American

(Strategy: Understanding contrasts)

Language Awareness

Semantic Focus

1. Read the posters and grade these adjectives from least to most:

Staggering, interesting, stunning.

Mysterious, supernatural, eerie, strange.

Excellent, good, wonderful, greatest

Enjoyable, watchable, amusing.

2. Find a headword for these words:

Psychiatrist, psychotic.
Thriller, whodunnit, mystery
Legend, novel, screenplay.
Movie, production, showing.

3. Find synonyms or similar words for the following: acclaimed, long for, wisecracking, exacting.

4. Collocations. Classify these films combining words from the three columns:

Star Wars	Gone with the Wind	Schindler's List
Home Alone	The House of Spirits	Mrs. Doubtfire
Aladdin	Rio Bravo	Philadelphia
The Marx Brothers	The Beauty and the Beast	Gandhi
at the Opera	Jurassic Park	The Exorcist
Tarzan and his Mate	The Pink Panther	Police Academy

Deeply entertaining	family	epic
Intense	classic	hit
Enjoyable	winning	adventure
Stunning	box-office	thriller
Amusing	anti-war	story
Moving	classic	yarn
Pleasant	political	campaign
Multi-Oscar	action-adventure	comedy
Timeless	Christmassy	tale
Sentimental	supernatural	blockbuster
Biggest	animated	western
Brilliant	special effects	flick
Riveting	intergalactic	action film
Very interesting	touching	chiller
Gripping	hilarious	musical
	screwball	

5. Find these words in the texts and try to deduce their meaning. What clues did you find in the text to help you make the deduction?

trial, insight, stormy, hulking, deceptively, wisecracking.

Grammar Awareness

1. Word formation: Scan the posters and find adjectives with these endings: al, ent, ous, ic, y, ive, ed, ble, an, ing, like, shire, ish.
(Answers on the end of this article)

2. Noun phrases

English has a great many examples of noun phrases (compounds) which, although used as single words, are made up of two or more elements. The discourse of film posters usually develops a content packed-sentence, very often crammed with compound words.

In these texts there are many examples of such combinations. Sort the noun phrases according to grammatical categories, e.g.

Adjective + Noun

Bohemian Frenchman Noun + Noun

King Arthur Note that in some cases the first element of the compound is a compound itself, e.g., A multi-Oscar winning film.

Production

1. Language Functions (speaking)

Entertainment

In pairs, suggest a film and invite your friend.

Suggesting/Inviting.

A	B
Suggest going to a film	See a film
Ask B what film	Name a film
Ask B opinion	Give opinion
Ask B what film/about?	Tell A type of film/plot
Ask B actor/actress	Give names

Invite B to come with you Accept/Refuse

Recommending:

1. It's (really) worth seeing/
going to see it.
2. You (really) should go to see it/
see it.
3. You (really) must..

Agreeing and persuading:

In groups, discuss current films and try to reach a decision on the best one.
Give convincing reasons to persuade your peers.

2. Grammar production. *Make compounds to describe eight different types of films.* (writing or speaking)

3. Design a poster for one of these films or any one of your favourite films. *You may want to use some of the words in exercise 4 (Semantic focus).* (writing)

Shadowlands Jurassic Park The Piano The Remains of the Day

4. Write a composition about an actress or actor mentioned in the posters. *Make a description and mention any facts you know about her/his life.* (writing).

5. Game. *In groups of four, decide which films these stories correspond to and write down your answers on a piece of paper.* Organize a class competition.

1. Romantic comedy in which a hooker makes a business arrangement with a millionaire.
2. A high-class Victorian gentleman falls for a dishonoured woman.
3. Enterprising young Dubliner gathers a gang of friends to form a "soul" band.
4. When the McCallister family rush off to Paris for Christmas, they forget their youngest son.
5. Union soldier sent to a deserted outpost in the Western Frontier, comes into contact with a tribe of Sioux and gradually assimilates

their culture.

6. Maverick English teacher who shakes up the traditional American system, inspiring creativity and self-worth in his pupils.
7. Vietnam veteran sadly returns home and ultimately dedicates himself to the anti-war campaign.
8. Doctor dedicated to finding a cure for "sleeping sickness."

(Strategy: Arousing students' interest/Reaching consensus/Application of schemata).

6. Assignment: *Write a composition about your favourite film.* Prepare an introduction, the development of the story (event/crisis) and the end. (writing).

7. If possible, show them one of the (aforementioned) films. (listening).

Answers to Grammar Awareness

1. al: typical, medieval, supernatural, brutal /ent: excellent/ ous: mysterious/ ic: classic, romantic, gothic, atmospheric/ y: stormy/ ive: alliterative, perceptive, provocative/ ed: green-thumbed, imprisoned, inexperienced, orphaned/ ble: watchable, enjoyable, unmissable/ shire: Yorkshire/an: American, bohemian, Arthurian/ ing: fascinating, hulking, interesting, staggering, amusing, exacting, leading/ like: ladylike/ ish: stylish.

2. *Noun groups:*

Adjective + Noun

Alliterative verse, Bohemian Frenchman, Supernatural opponent, Gallant Knight.

ing (Adjective) + Noun

Hulking Gerard Depardieu, Leading ladies stunning performances.

ed (Adjective) + Noun

Tortured Dane, Imprisoned Psychiatrist.

Adverb + Adjective + Noun

Hugely enjoyable film, Deceptively ladylike detective.
Adjective + ed (Adjective) + Noun

Young orphaned girl.
Adjective + ed (Adjective) + Noun + Noun

Green-thumbed New York career girl.
Adjective + ing (Adjective) + Noun

Wisecracking ladies, fast-living ladies.
Noun + ing (Adjective) + Noun

Life-changing vacation, Oscar-winning film.
Adverb + ing (Adjective) + Noun

Truly spine-tingling performance, Eternally fascinating Elizabeth Bennett,
Most exciting role.
Adjective + Noun + Noun

Unmissable February treat, Brutal serial killer.
Adverb + ed (Adjective) + Noun

Intelligently pruned-down screenplay, Beautifully photographed America.
Noun + Adjective + Noun

Jane Austen's classic novel, Christie's suspense thriller.

N.B. These categories can be simplified or made under other criteria.

Answers to Grammar Awareness

1. Pretty Woman
2. The French Lieutenant's Woman
3. The Commitments
4. Home Alone
5. Dances with Wolves
6. Dead Poet's Society
7. Born on the Fourth of July
8. Braveheart
9. Awakenings